NCA
VOC FOR PGM/FN
BACKGROUNDER NO. 5-6102 AUGUST 24, 1978
DAVID LENT/ROME

FOCUS: IGNAZIO SILONE -- FIRST DISSIDENT (OBIT)

ANNCR:

ON WEDNESDAY, ITALIAN AUTHOR OF THE CLASSIC NOVEL OF ANTI-FASCISM," BREAD AND WINE," AND CO-FOUNDER OF THE ITALIAN COMMUNIST PARTY -- IGNAZIO SILONE -- DIED AT THE AGE OF SEVENTY-EIGHT IN GENEVA AFTER A LONG ILLNESS. VOA'S ROME CORRESPONDENT DAVID LENT PROVIDES THIS REVIEW OF THE MAN AND HIS LIFE.

VOICE:

IGNAZIO SILONE HAD MANY FACETS -- BUT ONE WHICH CATCHES THE EYE IS HIS TRAIL-BLAZING BREAK WITH STALINISM AND FINALLY WITH COMMUNISM. BY NINETEEN-THIRTY-ONE HE HAD LEFT THE COMMUNIST MOVEMENT OF WHICH HE WAS A FOUNDING MEMBER -- AND THUS, IN A SENSE, IS ONE OF THE FIRST DISSIDENTS AGAINST ITS REPRESSIONS.

BORN IN THE ABRUZZI MOUNTAIN TOWN OF EPESCINA IN NINETEEN-HUNDRED -- IGNAZIO SILONE LED AN UNHAPPY CHILDHOOD. HIS FATHER DIED SOON AFTER HE WAS BORN -- AND HIS MOTHER AND ALL BUT ONE BROTHER DIED IN AN EARTHQUAKE WHEN HE WAS NINETEEN.

THE BOY WAS ASSISTED BY A PRIEST WHO TOOK HIM TO ROME. THERE HE JOINED THE SOCIALIST PARTY AND EDITED ITS NEWSPAPER. IN NINETEEN-TWENTY-ONE, HE CO-FOUNDED THE ITALIAN COMMUNIST PARTY WITH PALMIRO TOGLIATTI.

IT WAS AT THIS POINT THAT THE BOY -- BORN SECONDINO TRANQUILLI -- ASSUMED A "NOM DE GUERRE." IGNAZIO HE TOOK FROM ONE OF THE LAST WARRIOR SAINTS." SILONE WAS AN ANCIENT HERO OF HIS BIRTHPLACE WHO HAD FOUGHT AGAINST THE ROMANS TWO THOUSAND YEARS AGO.

IN NINETEEN-TWENTY-SEVEN SILONE WAS FORCED TO FLEE ITALY'S FASCIST REGIME UNDER BENITO MUSSOLINI. HE WENT TO MOSCOW WHERE

HE SOON BEGAN TO QUARREL WITH COMINTERN LEADERS REGARDING THE SITUATION IN ITALY.

DISPUTES ALSO AROSE OVER THE COMINTERN EXPULSION OF LEON TROTSKY FOR ALLEGED COUNTER-REVOLUTIONARY ACTIVITY. STALIN REFUSED SILONE AND OTHERS ACCESS TO THE DOCUMENT UPON WHICH THE EXPULSION WAS BASED.

BUT THE FINAL BREAK CAME OVER THE ISSUE OF STALIN'S MASSACRE OF PEASANTS DURING THE FORCED INDUSTRIALIZATION OF THE SOVIET UNION. THIS WAS THE ISSUE WHICH CAUSED A PARTING OF THE WAYS BETWEEN SILONE AND TOGLIATTI. SILONE CHOSE THE WAY OF HIS CONSCIENCE. TOGLIATTI -- ARGUING THAT PROLETARIAN REVOLUTION CANNOT BE JUDGED BY NORMAL STANDARDS -- SUPPRESSED HIS.

IN NINETEEN-THIRTY-ONE, THE BREAK BECAME IRREVOCABLE. THE ITALIAN COMMUNIST PARTY -- IN AN ACT OF LOYALTY TO THE SOVIET UNION -- REFUSED SILONE'S RESIGNATION AND EXPELLED HIM. HE RE-JOINED THE SOCIALIST PARTY.

AT THIS TIME, SILONE BEGAN TO EXPAND HIS WRITINGS. ONE OF HIS BEST-KNOWN BOOKS WAS "FONTAMARA" WHICH COINCIDED WITH HIS BREAK WITH COMMUNISM. (OPT) IN NINETEEN-THIRTY-SEVEN HE PUBLISHED "BREAD AND WINE" -- A SUMMING UP OF HIS POLITICAL BELIEFS. (END OPT

IN AN INTERVIEW IN THE SOCIALIST NEWSPAPER "AVANTI" -- JUST A MONTH BEFORE HIS DEATH -- SILONE SAID HE HAD DETECTED NO STRUCTURAL CHANGE IN ITALY'S COMMUNIST PARTY -- DESPITE THE POLICIES OF ENRICO BERLINGUER AND HIS GOAL OF THE "HISTORICAL COMPROMISE" WITH ITALY'S CHRISTIAN DEMOCRATS. "I DO NOT BELIEVE," HE SAID, "IN THE VALIDITY OF THE HISTORICAL COMPROMISE." (OPT)A CONTEMPORARY CATHOLIC AUTHOR, GENO PAMPALONI, SAID IN A NEWSPAPER TRIBUTE: "NO ONE UNDERSTOOD BETTER THAN SILONE THAT

THE FIGHT AGAINST FASCISM HAD BEEN TRANSFORMED INTO A BROADER BATTLE AGAINST TOTALITARIANISM IN GENERAL." SILONE, HE SAID , "HAS BEEN THE ITALIAN POET OF DISSENT."

WJL/RCS